Minutes of Meeting of
The Commission of Fine Arts
7 September 1955

The Commission met pursuant to notice at 9:30 a.m., with David E. Finley, Chairman, presiding.

Present were: David E. Finley, Chairman
Mrs. Emily Muir
William G. Perry
Felix de Weldon
Douglas W. Orr

L.R. Wilson, Secretary
Gilbert Halasz, Stenotypist

Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Chairman reported that because of the heavy workload, minutes of the previous meeting had not as yet been prepared.

Dates of next meeting

The dates of the next two meetings were confirmed for October 5 and 6 and November 9 and 10.

Discussions

a. Change in location for Constitution Avenue Bridge-status report

Mr. Orr reviewed for the members the status of the design for the proposed Constitution Avenue Bridge. He recalled that the Commission of Fine Arts had vigorously opposed plans that were authorized for a bridge parallel to the Memorial Bridge in front of the Lincoln Memorial. He noted that, through the intercession of the Commission, the Trustees of the Theodore Roosevelt Association had agreed to allow a bridge to cross the southern tip of Theodore Roosevelt Island, thus moving the site northward from the authorized site. The Commission had agreed to support a crossing at the new location as the lesser of two evils, and to spend every effort in getting a suitable design.

b. Formulation of a New Executive Order for the Commission of Fine Arts.

The Chairman explained that there were many new agencies and officials in Washington who were unaware of the functions of the Commission of Fine Arts. He asked the members for their opinion of the desirability of a new Executive Order for the Commission of Fine Arts, stating that all Federal officials, including the officials of the District of Columbia Government, should not approve any design or plan that had an aesthetic content affecting the location of buildings, bridges, monuments, etc., without first consulting the Commission of Fine Arts, for advice, and requiring them to make an official report of any refusal to accept the advice. The members agreed that the Chairman should take steps to explore the possibility of getting a new Executive Order.

c. Status of plans for approach roads to the Constitution Avenue Bridge

Mr. Price and Mr. Conrad of the National Capital Planning Commission reviewed, for the members, the status of plans for approach roads to the proposed Constitution Avenue Bridge. The members made a suggestion to move the interchanges of E Street and Constitution Avenue closer together so that the circular road movements which were shown lying over and south of Constitution Avenue would be moved north of the Avenue. This change would also involve movement of the bridge north, perhaps 500 feet. The grounds of the Lincoln Memorial would be less affected by the roadway system. Mr. Conrad pointed out, however, that one of the reasons for not moving the bridge to the north would be the problem of adequate merging of distances for the E Street Corridor. The members stressed the importance of getting the roadways off the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial.

District of Columbia Government

Design of Street Light Standard for the District of Columbia (Mercury Vapor)

At his request, the members of the Commission accompanied Mr. J.N.Robertson, Director of Highways, and Mr. H. A. Freide, Electrical Engineer for the District of Columbia Department of Highways, in an inspection of a number of tall sample light standards for mercury vapor lamps, which the Highway Department had erected along the east side of Fourteenth Street, south of the District Building. Mr. Robertson explained that his Department was preparing a program to replace all the lighting standards on the streets of Washington, and that these samples standards represented the results of studies for this purpose. The members were concerned by the disruptive effects such a program, using tall standards with mercury vapor luminaires would have on the monumental areas of Washington, and on the more or less uniform system of street lighting now in use. Any new standard should be as good in design as the existing one, which was adopted after long study.

On the whole, the members felt that they could not approve any of the samples and that a light standard now in use on the roadways in the park to the south of the Washington Monument was more satisfactory than any of the new samples set up opposite the Commerce Department building. The members decided that the letter to Mr. Robertson should stress the importance of lighting standards to the appearance of the city of Washington. If Mr. Robertson desired to have a new standard designed, the members said they would be glad to discuss a modified design with him, at his convenience. Exhibit A.

Freer Gallery of Art-Inspection of Acquisitions

The members of the Commission visited the Freer Gallery of Art to inspect four items recommended for purchase for the Gallery by Mr. A. G. Wenley, Director. Purchase of the items was approved. Exhibit B.

District of Columbia Government - Department of Highways
Constitution Avenue Bridge

The members of the Commission met with representatives of the District of Columbia Department of Highways, the National Capital Planning Commission and the bridge designers to discuss developments in the design of the proposed Constitution Avenue Bridge for the site across the southern tip of Theodore Roosevelt Island. Progress in visualizing many problems of design in crossing the river at this point was evident in the drawings presented. The members of the Commission considered that a scale model was necessary and requested that such a model be made. Nine questions, with reference to designing specific features of the bridge were also presented for the consideration of the Commission. A letter was prepared, embodying the members' answers, and sent to the Director of Highways. Exhibit C.

Gift to the White House=Great Seal of the United States

The members studied colored photographs of a polychromed wood carving of the Great Seal of the United States by Mr. Henry C. Avery, of West Springfield, Massachusetts, who wished to donate it for use in the President's offices. The members, however, felt that there was no place for a free standing seal there, and that Mr. Avery's work would not harmonize with the architectural setting. It was also pointed out that the Executive Offices were already well supplied with Great Seals which were designed for the spots which they filled. The Chairman said he would try to find another location that would be appropriate and satisfy Mr. Avery. Exhibit D.

Proposed Statue of Esther Morris-List of Sculptors

The Secretary read a letter from Mrs. Barbara A. Cross, of Douglas, Wyoming, requesting the Commission of Fine Arts to furnish names of sculptors qualified to execute a statue of Esther Morris for the state of Wyoming. The members of the Commission were unanimous in recommending that the Memorial Commission for the statue consider a sculptress for the proposed work and directed the Secretary to forward a list of names for consideration. Exhibit E.

Status of National Academy of Design's Advisory Council on Postage Stamps

The Secretary read a letter from Mr. Lawrence Grant White, President of the National Academy of Design in which he regretted that official recognition had not been given by the government to the National Academy of Design's Advisory Council on Postage Stamps. The members directed the Secretary to write Mr. White and express their regret that the Post Office Department had not found it opportune to work out some official recognition for the Advisory Council, but they hoped that the matter might be reopened at some future date when a new design was to be considered. Exhibit F.

Meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

L. R. Wilson, Secretary

20 October 1955

Dear Mr. Robertson:

During the course of a meeting on 7 September 1955, the members of the Commission of Fine Arts were happy for the opportunity to inspect the sample light poles which the District of Columbia Highway Department had erected along the east side of Fourteenth Street, south of the District Building. They inspected the poles again during the meeting on 6 October 1955, and after careful study, the members asked me to send you the following comments:

BASE: The base should be as low and inconspicuous as possible. The four nob-shaped covers (used to give access to the anchor bolts) should be kept as simple as possible, and the molded ornamentation on these covers should be omitted.

POLE: The height of the pole is acceptable. In design, the fluted or octagonal cross-section is preferred to the round plain section. In material, steel and aluminum are equally acceptable, but it is understood that aluminum discolors in time.

LUMINAIRE BRACKET: The curved form of this feature is not, in their opinion, an effective design for urban use. The shape has no relation to that of the pole, and the curve tends to attract undue attention to itself. A straight horizontal bracket would be more harmonious with the vertical and horizontal lines that prevail in the city streets.

LUMINAIRE: The shiny outer surface of the upper part of the lamp is a distracting element in the design.

The curved brace should be omitted if it is not structurally necessary. If necessary, the ends of the brace should lie flat, without the little upward curve that is used in the standards we inspected. The brace, if used, should have a well-rounded curve and the point at which it is fixed to the bracket, measured from the pole, should be about two-thirds of the length of the bracket.

On the whole, the members felt that the light standards on the roadways to the south of the Washington Monument were more satisfactory in design than the samples set up opposite the Commerce Department Building.

If you wish to prepare a modified design, the Commission will be glad to discuss the matter with you at your convenience. The members consider the design of the lighting standards a matter of the utmost importance to the appearance of the City of Washington.

Sincerely yours,

L. R. Wilson
Secretary

Mr. J. N. Robertson
Director of Highways
Department of Highways
District Building
Washington 25, D. C.

COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

The Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, The Commission of Fine Arts, and Miss Katharine N. Rhoades, or Mrs. Eugene Meyer, as provided in Paragraph 4 of the Codicil to the Will of the late Charles L. Freer, have examined the following objects;

1 Knife of Jahangir; inlaid, of meteoric iron; India, 17th century.

1 Painting, Chinese, Six Dynasties, handscroll, landscape.

1 Pair of screens, Japanese; 6-fold, scenes of the four seasons; by Motonobu, Kano school, early 16th century.

1 Miniature, Mughal, 17th century; sage with two visiting princes and attendants,

which have been recommended for purchase for the Freer Gallery of Art by Mr. A. G. Wenley, Director, and they hereby approve the purchase.

For the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution

7 September 1955 David E. Finley

For the Commission of Fine Arts

Exhibit B

Charter for Fine Arts

The Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, The Commission of Fine Arts, and Miss Katherine H. Rhoades, or Mrs. Eugene Meyer, as provided in Paragraph 4 of the Codicil to the Will of the late Charles L. Freer, have examined the following objects;

1. Knife of Damagir; inlaid, of meteoric iron; India, 17th century.

2. Painting, Chinese, 4th Dynasties, Northcott, Landscape.

3. Pair of screens, Japanese, 6-fold, scenes of the four seasons; by Hotsonobu, Kano school, early 18th century.

4. Miniature, Mogul, 17th century; page with two vignetting princes and attendants.

which have been recommended for purchase for the Freer Gallery of Art by Dr. W. R. Valentiner, Director, and they hereby approve the purchase.

7 September 1939

David K. E. Finley

For the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution

For the Commission of Fine Arts

September 14, 1955

Mr. J. M. Robertson
Director of Highways
Department of Highways
District Building
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Robertson:

The members of the Commission of Fine Arts were glad to meet with you and your assistants on September 7, 1955 and to have an opportunity to discuss the current developments in the plans for the projected Constitution Avenue-Theodore Roosevelt Island Bridge.

Progress in visualizing many problems of design that are involved in crossing the river at this point was evident in the plan presented by Mr. D. S. Brinkley. The nine questions with reference to designing the Constitution Avenue Bridge, which were presented for the Commission's consideration by Mr. G. I. Sawyer of your office, have been carefully considered by the members of the Commission who have asked me to reply to you as follows:

1. Is the network of roadways on the Washington approach acceptable to the Commission?

The position of the network of roadways on the Washington approach is not yet acceptable. The Commission believes there should be no encroachment of the bridge approaches on the Mall area south of Constitution Avenue.

2. Are the structures as indicated on the Washington approach acceptable as to location and desirability?

The structures as indicated on the Washington approach are consequently not acceptable as to location and desirability. The overhead crossing of Constitution Avenue at 23rd Street is especially undesirable.

3. Should the bridge deck be lower than the Memorial Bridge, or at the same elevation as the Memorial Bridge, or at a greater elevation than the Memorial Bridge?

The bridge deck should be as low as possible, particularly at the point where it crosses Theodore Roosevelt Island.

EXHIBIT C

4. Will the Commission accept the construction of embankments on the Washington approach to the bridge in lieu of continuous structures spanning over the area?

Construction of embankments is acceptable in principle.

5. Will the Commission recommend a steel bridge on stone-faced walls, or a concrete bridge with steel-faced fascia beams, or will the Commission insist on construction of a masonry bridge?

The Commission does not prefer a masonry bridge, but would like to see studies of the above alternatives. The bridge structure should be as light as possible.

6. Is the general location of the bridge acceptable to the Commission?

The Commission believes that the location of the bridge is acceptable in general, but it is not yet ready to indicate approval in detail. The intersection on the Washington shore may have to be moved further north to accommodate the revised interchanges.

7. Is the Commission receptive to the idea of constructing retaining walls across Roosevelt Island which would retain a large fill which in turn would blend in with the existing topography of the Island?

The Commission is receptive in principle to the idea of constructing retaining walls across the southern tip of Roosevelt Island as long as they blend with the existing topography of the Island. The Commission understands that the Theodore Roosevelt Association desires provisions in the design to permit pedestrian and vehicular access to the Island. The problem of entrance and exit as well as the number of cars that can be parked should be studied after consultation with the Theodore Roosevelt Island Association.

8. Is the Commission interested in the aesthetic treatment of the Virginia approach to the bridge?

The Commission is very much interested in the aesthetic treatment of the Virginia approach to the bridge; especially, in the

views of the city from the Lincoln Memorial, and the views of the Lincoln Memorial from the bridge over the eastern channel of the river.

9. Will the Commission recommend to the District whether or not the overpasses on the Washington approach to the bridge should be of stone masonry or of steel construction?

The Commission recommends that the overpasses adjacent to the Mall on the Washington approach to the bridge be of masonry rather than steel.

The members of the Commission believe that the construction of a study model will facilitate achieving satisfactory development of many of the design problems raised and they hope that steps may be taken to study the conditions by this method at the earliest opportunity.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

David E. Finley
Chairman

cc to:

Engineer Commissioner, District of Columbia
Chairman, National Capital Planning Commission
Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior
Director, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Association

15 September 1955

Mr. Henry C. Avery
6 Upper Beverly Hills
West Springfield, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Avery:

During the course of the meeting on 8 September 1955, I showed the members of the Commission of Fine Arts the fine colored photographs you sent me of the Great Seal of the United States, which you carved and which you have generously offered to donate to the White House for use in the President's office. Unfortunately, the Executive Offices are already well supplied with Great Seals which were designed for the spots they fill, and the members felt that a free standing seal would not harmonize with the architectural setting. They asked me to write you to learn whether you would wish to donate your carving to some other public building where such a seal could suitably be used. Will you kindly advise me? Until I hear from you, I will hold the photographs which you previously requested me to return.

Sincerely yours,

L. R. Wilson
Secretary

cc to:

Senator Leverett Saltonstall
White House

EXHIBIT D

13 September 1955

Mrs. Barbara A. Cross
Box 176
Douglas, Wyoming

Dear Mrs. Cross:

During the course of the Commission's meeting on 7 September 1955, I read your letter of 9 August 1955 to the members of the Commission of Fine Arts. They were unanimous in recommending that your Memorial Commission consider a sculptress for the proposed Esther Morris Statue and asked me to forward the attached list of names as suggestions for your use.

If I can be of further service, please advise me.

Sincerely yours,

L. R. Wilson
Secretary

Enclosure

EXHIBIT E

LIST OF SCULPTORS FOR ARTISTS FOR WORLD UNITY

Sally Cyan
2 West 67th Street
New York, New York

Brenda Putnam
350 West 22nd Street
New York, New York

Anne Hyatt Huntington
Redding, Connecticut

Malvina Hoffman
137 East 38th Street
New York, New York

Frances Rich
4385 Marine Drive
Santa Barbara, California

Margaret F. Cresson
"Chesterwood"
Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Nina Vinal
Sculpture Center
New York, New York

Dorothea Greenbaum
2 East 86th Street
New York 28, New York

15 September 1955

Mr. Lawrence Grant White, President
National Academy of Design
1083 Fifth Avenue
New York 28, New York

Dear Mr. White:

I read your letter of 23 August 1955 to Mr. Finley and the members of the Commission of Fine Arts at the meeting on 7 September 1955. Mr. Arno's design and your committee's work were most favorably noted. We regret that the Post Office Department has not as yet found it opportune to work out some official recognition for the Advisory Committee, but it is possible that after the stamp has appeared, or a new design is desired, the matter may be reopened.

Sincerely yours,

E. E. Wilson
Secretary

EXHIBIT F

RECEIVED
THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
WASHINGTON, D. C.
AUG 2 1955
Card MAP
NOTED

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN

1083 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 28, N.Y.
Founded 1825
Telephone ENright 9-4880

Officers
LAWRENCE GRANT WHITE
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1st Vice President
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STEPHEN CSOKA
LADYS ROCKMORE DAVIS
FRITZ EICHENBERG
JOHN C. PELLEW
WILLIAM A. SMITH

Director
VERNON C PORTER

August 23, 1955

Mr. L.R.Wilson, Secretary
The Commission of Fine Arts
Interior Department Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Wilson:

Enclosed is a letter I have just received from Mr. Robertson. While it is encouraging to learn that Mr. Arno's fee and expenses will be paid by the Post Office Department, the phrase-"We note that your committee is waiting for some official recognition and status but do not know that this will be possible," is discouraging, to say the least. While the primary object of the Advisory Committee is to improve the design of our stamps, they should not be expected to operate in secrecy!

If recognition by the Post Office Department may not be "possible," we hope that Mr. Finley may be able to work out some connection with the Art Commission.

Yours sincerely,

Lawrence Grant White

LGW:MR

Lawrence Grant White, P.N.A.

cc Mr. N.Kent
Mr. E.Fiene
Mr. de Francisci
Mr. F.Eichenberg

EXHIBIT F

C O P Y:

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT
Assistant Postmaster General
Bureau of Finance
Washington 25, D.C.

August 17, 1955

Lawrence Grant White, President
National Academy of Design
1083 Fifth Avenue
New York 28, N.Y.

Dear Mr. White:

Thank you for your letter of August 12th and we are glad that your stamp committee was pleased with the wording of our official release in connection with the Fort Ticonderoga commemorative stamp. Preliminary comments on this stamp have been generally favorable but the real test will come when the stamps themselves are issued and in the hands of the public.

We note that your committee is waiting for some official recognition and status but do not know that this will be possible. We hope, however, to be able to make further use of your advice and counsel and on occasions to request designs for new stamps.

If Mr. Arno will submit his itemized bill, including his expenses for the trip to Washington, we shall put it into proper channels for payment.

The next time you are in Washington I shall be glad to discuss stamp design matters with you further and in the meantime send you my best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Albert J. Robertson

Albert J. Robertson
Assistant Postmaster General

EXHIBIT F

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8 September 1955

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